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U.S. Misread Soviets On Withdrawal From Games, Officials Say

By Don Oberdorfer
Washington Post Staff Writer

Embarrassed administration officials said yesterday that the U.S. Embassy in Moscow as well as U.S. intelligence agencies had misread signals over a period of weeks that the Soviet Union might withdraw from the Los Angeles Summer Olympics. When the decision was announced Tuesday, a State Department official said, "We were absolutely dumbfounded."

Officials conceded yesterday that in retrospect there were abundant signs from public as well as private sources that Moscow was unhappy and uncertain about participating in the summer games.

The misreading in the U.S. government was blamed on wishful thinking, continued Soviet preparations and even advance ticket payments for the games and a belief that the Soviets place a high priority on the honors and prestige they have usually won at Olympic contests.

Peter V. Ueberroth, president of the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee, was led to believe two weeks ago that he would receive a personal invitation to visit Soviet President Konstantin U. Chernenko in Moscow to answer any questions standing in the way of Soviet participation, according to administration and Olympic sources.

holding an alternative set of games, according to diplomatic sources in Washington.]

Formal announcements by the Warsaw Pact countries about their participation were not expected until their national Olympic committees convene, but the official Polish press agency today strongly signaled Poland's intention to stay away by saying a "question mark" hung over its attendance.

However, a senior sports official in Yugoslavia, which is Communist-ruled but does not belong to the Warsaw Pact, angrily deplored the Soviet move for violating the character of the Games.

Short of a miraculous change in the state of Soviet-American relations, western analysts here said, it would be unrealistic to expect a reversal of the Soviet decision, which was taken at the highest level, despite tactical soft-pedaling by some Soviet spokesmen.

[Western European governments, obviously dismayed by the Soviet decision, continued to hold out hope that Moscow might reconsider, Washington Post correspondent William Drozdiak reported from Bonn. Olympic officials announced that Juan Antonio Samaranch, the president of the International Olympic Committee and a former Spanish ambassador to the Soviet Union, would travel to Moscow Friday in an effort to convince the Soviets to abandon the boycott.]

The Soviet pullout took sporting and government officials in the West by surprise. Many said they did not believe the decision was final and began immediately to seek ways to persuade the Soviets to change their position and to keep any Soviet allies from joining the boycott.

[Peter Ueberroth, the head of the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee, said a delegation from his organization had been received cordially in East Germany yesterday, Washington Post staff writer Jane Leavy reported. He said other committee delegates would meet with officials from each of the nations with teams numbering more than 300 people in order to finalize arrangements.

"We're not taking one chance that anyone can say we didn't do everything," he said.

[He said his first indication of a change in the situation after recent meetings with Soviet officials in Lausanne, Switzerland, was when top athletic officials from the Eastern Bloc and Third World nations were summoned to Moscow beginning May 4. "We expected some kind of message," Ueberroth said.]

China took brief note of the Soviet decision and the U.S. reaction in an account by the New China News Agency, Washington Post correspondent Michael Weisskopf reported from Peking. "One cannot but be surprised at the decision by the Soviet Olympic Committee on nonparticipation in the Los Angeles Games," the news agency said. "We believe the Olympic Games will continue to make progress."

The Russians today defended their decision to stay away from Los Angeles with renewed charges of alleged "gross" violations of the Olympic Charter by the Reagan administration. Tass said the administration had failed to meet its obligations as "a host" of the Olympic Games and "has created an atmosphere of hostility and tension, which promotes the emergence of all sorts of extremist groups openly threatening to use the Los Angeles Games for anti-Soviet provocations."

While the Soviet decision is not seen by observers here as a direct revenge for the U.S.-led boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympic Games in Moscow, the American action four years ago is believed to have figured prominently in the current situation.

Had President Reagan sought to improve relations with the Russians, they undoubtedly would have gone to Los Angeles. But the state of bilateral ties had steadily deteriorated during Reagan's years and Moscow's boycott of Los Angeles was seen as a way to humiliate Reagan in a highly visible and somewhat embarrassing way.

Signs that the decision was clearly political were evident in today's Tass commentary, which restated Soviet complaints about alleged U.S. violations of the Olympic Charter and included that Soviet athletes would be in danger.

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